

## POLICY RESEARCH WORKING PAPER

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# Making Voice Work

## The Report Card on Bangalore's Public Service

*Samuel Paul*

A citizen's assessment of public services provided evidence of inefficiency and corruption and stimulated public service providers to be more responsive to customers. So, public feedback *can* change behavior.



## Summary findings

Paul reports how a "report card" on public services in the Indian city of Bangalore was used by citizen groups to create greater public awareness about the poor performance of public service providers and to challenge them to be more efficient and responsive to their customers.

The report card was the result of a survey of a sample of users (both rich and poor) of the city's services and rated public agencies in terms of public satisfaction with different dimensions of their services. Public feedback was used to quantify the extent of corruption and other indirect costs of the services. The result was a citizens' assessment of public services.

The survey was completed in 1993, but the follow-up activities continued for three years, with the active involvement of several concerned citizen groups and nongovernment bodies. Paul discusses how the media

disseminated the report card findings, how public agencies responded to it, and how agencies joined citizen groups in joint initiatives to improve services. Similar report cards have since been prepared on several other large cities in India.

It is not easy to measure the impact of the report card on the quality and responsiveness of Bangalore's service providers. Paul examines the problems involved and gives some intermediate indicators.

There is some evidence that public awareness of the problems has increased as a result of the experiment. Civil society institutions seem to be more active and their interactions with public agencies have become better organized, more purposeful, and continuous. As a result, some public agencies in Bangalore have begun to take steps to improve their services.

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**Making Voice Work:  
The Report Card on Bangalore's Public Services**

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# **Making Voice Work: The Report Card on Bangalore's Public Services**

**Samuel Paul**

## **Executive Summary**

This paper narrates how a "report card" on public services in the Indian city of Bangalore was used by several civil society institutions both to create greater public awareness about the poor performance of their public service providers and to challenge the latter to be more efficient and responsive to their customers. The report card consisted of a sample survey of the users of the city's services (both rich and poor) and a rating of the public agencies in terms of public satisfaction with different dimensions of their services. Public feedback was also used to quantify the extent of corruption and other indirect costs of the services. The end result was an assessment of public services from the perspective of citizens.

The survey was completed in 1993, but the follow up activities continued for the next three years, with the active involvement of several citizen groups and non-governmental bodies concerned about these issues. The involvement of the media in disseminating the findings of the report card, the responses of public agencies to the report card and the joint initiatives to improve services by the agencies and citizen groups are among the subjects discussed in this paper. Similar report cards have since been prepared on several other large cities in India.

The measurement of the impact of the report card on changes in the quality and responsiveness of service providers is not an easy task. The paper examines the problems involved and provides some data by way of intermediate indicators. There is some evidence that public awareness of these problems has increased as a result of the experiment. Civil society institutions seem to be more active on this front and their interactions with public agencies have become better organized, purposive and continuous. As a result, some public agencies in Bangalore have begun to take steps to improve their services. The paper concludes that public feedback ("voice") in the form of a report card has the potential to challenge governments and their agencies to become more efficient and responsive to customers.

## **Making Voice Work: The Report Card on Bangalore's Public Services**

**Samuel Paul**

Can "organised public feedback" be used as a form of voice to demand greater public accountability? The "report card" on public services in Bangalore was an experiment to answer this question. It was initiated by this author with the support of a small group of other concerned citizens who felt that collective action to improve services might be facilitated by this intervention. Field work support was provided by a local market research agency. Survey costs were met largely through the mobilization of local donations. Similar report card studies have since been prepared for several other cities in India (Paul: 95; Paul and Sekhar: 98).

The primary objective of this civil society initiated "report card" project in Bangalore was to create greater public awareness about the poor performance of the providers of essential services in the city and through this process to stimulate the concerned public agencies to serve their customers better. As an independent, non-governmental endeavour, the project had no power or influence over the service providers or the citizens of Bangalore. Its organisers felt that if the report card findings were interesting, citizens would listen. Whether this would lead to citizen action to demand greater public accountability or provoke service providers to perform better was difficult to predict. Such outcomes depend on a constellation of factors none of which was under the organisers' control. An incisive report card on public services could, at best, be a catalyst in the process.

The report card on Bangalore's public services was prepared in 1993. Urban services were considered to be unsatisfactory by many people at this time. Almost all essential services were the responsibility of the government and were managed and regulated by specified authorities such as the city municipal corporation, electricity board, water authority, etc. As public authorities, they operate under certain political and administrative constraints that do not apply to private enterprises of similar size. The rapid expansion of the city no doubt added to their burden without a corresponding expansion of their resources. But their poor performance and relative lack of accountability could not by any means be attributed solely to these factors. The monopolistic nature of their operations, inefficient planning and management of public resources, lack of internal incentives to perform, and public apathy to this state of affairs are other factors which may also have contributed to the problems facing the city.

## **Design of the Report Card**

A report card represents an assessment of the public services of the city from the perspective of its citizens. The latter are the users of these services and can provide authentic feedback on the quality, efficiency and adequacy of the services and the problems they face in their interactions with the service providers. They may not be able to comment on the technical features and standards of the services or to evaluate the overall performance of a provider. But they are eminently qualified to say whether the service meets their needs, and whether the agency is responsive, corrupt, reliable, etc. When customers rate an agency on different dimensions of the service, it provides a basis for judging its performance as a service provider. Since citizens are customers of several different services, it is possible to compare ratings of this kind across services. The resultant pattern of ratings (based on public satisfaction) is then converted into a "report card" on the city's services. A report card permits the ranking of public agencies both in terms of the overall public satisfaction with services and of their specific dimensions such as quality, corruption, etc. Since cities have large populations, proper sampling procedures need to be followed in order to derive statistically reliable ratings.

The concept of the report card and client surveys are new to most governments and their agencies. But private firms operating in a competitive environment make use of this approach in many countries. It is in light of the information gathered through such surveys and analysis that they redesign their products and services and improve staff training and delivery modes. The private sector seeks customer feedback because it provides information and insights that rates of return and other financial measures cannot offer. A monopolist may survive and even earn a high rate of return despite unsatisfactory services because customers have no choice.

## **A Report Card on Bangalore**

Bangalore was a city of 4.5 million people in 1993, and a growing centre of modern industries and scientific research. Despite its emergence as a leading centre of commerce and industry, its public services and infrastructure suffer from the same problems and constraints as other large urban centres in India. The basic civic services are provided by the city's municipal corporation while services such as water, power, telecom, urban planning, etc., are the responsibility of other specialised public authorities that are outside the control of the municipal body. All these agencies are managed at senior levels by staff who are deputed from the state government and whose tenures on the job tend to be rather short.

As noted above, the report card on Bangalore's public services was planned by this author who subsequently founded the Public Affairs Centre, an independent organisation that is dedicated to the cause of improving the quality of governance in the country. The study was grounded in the belief that systematic public feedback on urban services might act as the "collective voice" of the people and provide a basis for demanding greater public accountability. A small advisory group of local leaders supported this project. But neither the government nor any of its agencies was associated with the initiative. Field work for the study was carried out by Marketing and Business Associates (MBA) Ltd., a leading market research agency based in Bangalore.

The study that resulted in the report card focused on the following questions: How satisfactory are the public services that matter most to the citizens of Bangalore? What specific aspects of their working are satisfactory or unsatisfactory? What are the direct and indirect costs of these services to their users? Can the information generated through the survey be used to rate the performance of service providers ?

A stratified random sample survey was the method adopted to probe the issues listed above. Focus group discussions and mini case studies of problems from different parts of the city were undertaken at the outset in order to sharpen the issues for study and the questions to be asked. The city was stratified according to the age of the localities. Six areas were then selected and within each area, sample households that had interacted with at least one service provider in the preceding six months were identified using random numbers. Separate samples were selected from among general (middle and upper income) households and poor (low income) households. Responses were obtained from 807 general households in the city. The sample size of poor households interviewed was 327. These households were also selected from the same localities from which the general households came. These sample sizes are large enough so that error ranges are well within generally accepted statistical norms. Structured questionnaires were administered to the respondents by trained investigators. (For further details, see Paul: 95). Show cards were used to help respondents specify the ratings of their satisfaction with a service.

The surveys were conducted separately for the general households (middle and upper income people) and the slum households (low income people) in the city. The services of interest to these two groups are not identical. The urban poor were estimated to be about a tenth of the population in Bangalore. Since the problems faced by the poor were different from those of the higher income groups, different questions were asked of the former and the interview methods were adapted to their contexts. The rating scales

used for the general households, for example, were considered inappropriate in the context of the low income and less literate households.

## **Major Findings**

The study did not identify a predetermined set of public agencies for investigation. Instead, respondents were asked to focus on the agencies with which they had interacted in connection with a problem or to get a service. It was then found that the electricity board, the water and sewerage board, the municipal corporation, telecom, public sector banks and hospitals and the city's development authority were the agencies with which citizens had the most interactions. The study also revealed that nearly 92 per cent of these transactions were made through personal visits by the respondents. In two thirds of the cases, they had to make two or more visits to solve a problem. Even when some of them phoned or wrote to an official, this had invariably to be followed up with visits to the agency office. The feedback clearly brought out the time consuming and cumbersome ways in which citizens had to deal with the major service providers of the city.

The use of a rating scale permitted the respondents to quantify the extent of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service of an agency. The scale was used not only for an overall assessment of an agency but also for different dimensions of its service. The end product of the scaling process is a set of scores by respondents that could be used to rank and compare the public's rating of agency services. These scores signify the patterns of perceptions of the public about agency performance in a way that isolated complaints can never do.

The tables presented below summarise the major findings of the report card. The tables under "general households" highlight the ratings and related information pertaining largely to middle class people. The tables under "urban poor" refer to the ratings given by slum dwellers. For the latter group, the rating scale referred to above was not used. The satisfaction scores for the urban poor look somewhat better for this reason.



**Table 1: Overall Satisfaction with Public Agencies ( General Households)**

Agency	Average Rating	Percentage of users satisfied	Percentage of users dissatisfied
Telephones	3.6	9	28
Municipal Corporation	2.9	5	49
Electricity	3.5	6	31
Water	3.0	4	46
Health	4.3	25	19
Regional Transport Office	3.5	1	36
Development Authority	2.5	1	65
Public sector Banks	4.0	20	26

( A seven point rating scale was used in the survey. "Satisfied" refers to per cent satisfied {6} and very satisfied {7}. "Dissatisfied" refers to per cent very dissatisfied {1} and dissatisfied {2}.)

While the average ratings of the different agencies tell us a great deal about their performance, the feedback summed up in the next two columns are even more revealing. The Bangalore Development Authority has only one per cent satisfied. It has 65 per cent dissatisfied customers. In general, if the goal is to increase the proportion of its fully satisfied customers, the public agencies in Bangalore have a long way to go.

**Table 2 : Key Dimensions of Satisfaction, Average for All Agencies  
( General Households)**

Dimension	Percentage of respondents satisfied (average for all agencies)
Satisfaction with Behaviour of staff (%)	25
Percentage of those who made three or more visits to the agency	25
Problem resolution rate (%)	57

Some of the dimensions associated with satisfactory service are summarised in Table 2. People are concerned about the treatment they get in agency offices. They would like to get their services or problems settled with the least delay and cost. They would also expect to get a satisfactory resolution of their problems. Bangalore's public agencies, taken together , are perceived by their customers to have performed poorly on these counts. More detailed evidence by agency of dimensions such as staff behaviour, quality and information is found in Table 3.

**Table 3: Key Dimensions of Satisfaction By Agency (General Households)**

<b>Agency / Dimension of Satisfaction</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents satisfied</b>
<b>Staff Behaviour</b>	
Bangalore Development Authority	11
Bangalore City Corporation	31
Bangalore Water supply and Sewerage Board	26
Karnataka Electricity Board	18
Regional Transport Office	34
Telephones	24
Banks	35
Hospitals	27
<b>Quality of Service</b>	
Bangalore Development Authority	2
Bangalore City Corporation	10
Bangalore Water supply and Sewerage Board	13
Karnataka Electricity Board	19
Regional Transport Office	26
Telephones	16
Banks	23
Hospitals	21
<b>Information Provided</b>	
Bangalore Development Authority	4
Bangalore City Corporation	16
Bangalore Water supply and Sewerage Board	18
Karnataka Electricity Board	28
Regional Transport Office	27
Telephones	23
Banks	33
Hospitals	38

( "Satisfied" as defined in the note to Table 1)

**Table 4: The Speed Money Phenomenon ( General Households)**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Proportion in Sample claiming to having paid</b>	<b>Average Payment per Transaction ( in Rupees)</b>
Karnataka Electricity Board	11	206
Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board	12	275
Bangalore City Corporation	21	656
Public Hospitals	17	396
Regional Transport Office	33	648
Telephones	4	110
Bangalore Development Authority	33	1850
<b>Average</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>857</b>

Note: One US dollar = Rs. 30

Speed money (Table 4) refers to the bribes given and taken in order to ensure that services are provided satisfactorily. This is not a subject on which all people are willing to speak openly or in an unbiased fashion. It is not, however, easy to cross check the responses or to correct them for any biases. The only safety here is in numbers! Our knowledge of the nature of the services being provided by the different agencies can also be an indirect check on the veracity of the data. Thus, it seems logical that the speed money per transaction in the Development Authority that deals in property and house sites is much higher than that estimated for the Electricity Board. The Bangalore Development Authority has the highest proportion of people paying speed money.

**Table 5: Investment in Coping Mechanisms (in Million Rs.) (General Households)**

Asset invested in	Bangalore
Underground water tanks	1500
Overhead tanks	2335
Borewells	2685
Voltage stabilisers	500
Water filters	1750
Generators *	500
Total investment	10,000

\* Estimated to be in use by households

***Note: Total investment also includes other smaller items not listed above. It is an estimate for all the households in the city. The proportions of households owning these assets were estimated from the sample survey and current average prices of these assets were obtained from the market.***

Table 5 provides some interesting estimates for Bangalore city of the costs people incur in order to compensate for the unreliability and inadequacy of certain public services. Thus, people build underground and overhead tanks in order to be sure that they always have a reasonable supply of water in the home. It has been estimated that the interest (at 15 per cent) on the total unproductive investment reported in Table 5 amounts to seven times the property tax collection in Bangalore.

**Table 6: KEY DIMENSIONS OF AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS**

(Per cent of Urban Poor Agreeing with Statement)

Dimensions	Bangalore
Staff were helpful	40
Problem was attended to in time	38
Problem was solved in reasonable time	26
Three or more visits were made to agency	71
Problem was finally solved	38

Note: A weighted average of the figures for all agencies is used in each cell throughout the table)

Table 6 shows results for the sample of poor households. It is significant that the problem resolution rate for the poor is much lower than that for the general households. The proportion of the poor making three or more visits to solve their problems is also substantially higher than that of the general households.

An analysis of these tables and other findings of the report card leads to the following conclusions:

1. The levels of public satisfaction with the performance of service providers in Bangalore are uniformly low despite the marginally better ratings of some agencies. Corruption is widespread in most of the agencies and has no doubt contributed to the severity of public dissatisfaction. Corruption is a problem for the city's poor too, with a third among them having to pay a bribe to get a service or to solve a service related problem. Costs in terms of time and effort that people incur are quite heavy. It is significant that a majority of the respondents (54 per cent) are willing to officially pay more for the services provided they are of reliable quality rather than pay under the table with no assurance of quality.

2. The underlying lack of accountability on the part of the public agencies of Bangalore is attributable to several factors: the monopolistic nature of the organisations involved, inadequate supervision and lack of proper management systems, the prevalence of non-transparent practices, and the inability of citizens to access information and to undertake collective action are some of the forces at work. While a report card is not designed to provide a full scale problem diagnosis, the underlying information can point to the directions for further investigation.

3. Bangalore's report card challenges the myth that public services are cheap. Official fees and user charges for services may be low, but there are "hidden" costs that users incur. People are forced to invest their scarce resources in order to compensate for the unreliability and inadequacy of these services. Furthermore, they may have no option but to pay speed money to provider staff in order to obtain a service or to solve a service related problem.

4. The inter-agency comparisons with respect to public satisfaction and corruption permitted by a report card can potentially be an aid to create public awareness and to stimulate agency interest in addressing the underlying problems. Quantification and rankings demand attention in a way that anecdotes do not. They focus attention on specific agencies and services that can be embarrassing to those in charge especially because of the adverse publicity involved. How the report card was used in Bangalore to create public awareness and to stimulate agency response is narrated below.

## II

### **Impact of the Report Card**

The Bangalore report card was the first of its kind in India. There was no precedent available to us on the kinds of follow up actions to be taken upon completion of the report card. The exercise was not undertaken as an academic endeavour although it was recognised that its methodological implications and potential for inter-city comparison could be of interest to the academic world too. Our real interest, however, was in using the report card as an aid to improve service delivery and the accountability of the city's public service providers. But to achieve this objective, ways and means had to be invented to elicit positive responses from the service providers. The report card had little to say on how to invent them. It could at best act as a trigger to stimulate both the public at large and the service providers to think about and create the needed ways and means. In the absence of a structured path to achieve these objectives, it was decided to start with the dissemination of the findings and to take further steps

depending on the responses from the target groups. A more proactive role was ruled out by the author of the report card and the organisation he created simply because of the limited resources at their disposal.

### **Actions Taken**

The dissemination of information on the Bangalore report card was undertaken in three parts: First of all, the report was made available to the heads of all the public agencies covered by the study and to the Chief Minister and Chief Secretary of Karnataka. Secondly, the findings of the study were made known to the press through a mini-seminar. Thirdly, workshops on the report card were held in Bangalore specifically for dissemination of findings to interested citizen groups and other non-governmental organisations. This was followed up by similar meetings in New Delhi and Mumbai.

The responses from agency heads and senior government officials were polite, but lukewarm except for a few agencies. The Bangalore Development Authority (BDA), the worst rated city agency, responded with a request that the author meet with its senior officials for a detailed discussion. A couple of other agencies also wrote to say that they would like to put these findings to use. Some of the actions reported below were the result of the follow up of these responses. But five out of the eight agencies involved did not evince any interest nor did they contradict the findings. The senior most civil servant in the State noted with regret that corruption was a wider social problem the responsibility for which should not be placed on public officials alone.

In contrast, the response from the media was lively and positive almost without an exception. All the major newspapers in Bangalore publicised the findings. Needless to say, agency specific findings and the novelty of the method used were in part responsible for this response. And, of course, news about corruption always makes good copy! Interestingly, one of the dailies, the Times of India, started a weekly feature with a graphic depiction of one of the study findings at a time. This feature continued for about two months, thus keeping the report card phenomenon in public consciousness.

Seminars and meetings on the report card in Bangalore were attended by local activists in civic affairs, representatives of residents' associations and NGOs interested in the problems of the urban poor. Most participants were familiar with the poor performance of the city's public agencies, but did not have the information necessary to grade them or pinpoint specific problem areas. The report card gave them a handy tool to focus on issues of concern and stimulated them to think about remedial actions. Perhaps the most important outcome was the public awareness created by the report card on



the need for active citizen participation in order to improve the quality of civic services. At the time the report card was undertaken, very few active residents' groups existed in Bangalore. Today there are over a hundred and networking and common activities among them are on the increase. The report card has thus created greater public awareness and some confidence among citizens that collective action and networking are both desirable and feasible.

### **The Responses**

As noted above, there is no way to predict the likely consequences of a report card of the kind discussed here. Nor is there any reason to believe that any given sequence of responses or actions is inherently more effective than any other. Responses occur only when public agencies, citizen groups or the media internalise the findings and feel motivated to act. Sometimes, the motivation may exist, but the resources required or the capacity to organise action may have been lacking. We present below an array of responses/actions that followed the report card, but were not in any significant way orchestrated by PAC. It is difficult to say whether all of them contributed to improved accountability or service delivery on the part of the public agencies or to the control of corruption. Complex outcomes of this nature are influenced by a variety of factors. The important issue is whether the responses following the report card could be expected to strengthen or support the forces that seek to achieve these outcomes.

The responses narrated below fall into the following four categories. First, a number of other report cards were spawned, reflecting the interest of citizen groups and other activists to use this device and generate more information on services in order to highlight the problems or to demand greater public accountability. Second, public agencies in Bangalore began to use this approach to improve their understanding of the problems facing users of services and to take remedial action. Third, citizen groups and NGOs in Bangalore initiated collaborative activities for the resolution of the issues raised by the report card. Fourth, the media began to build on the report card findings and probe them further for wider dissemination.

### **Replication of Report Cards**

The publication of the Bangalore report card and subsequent meetings on this subject in other cities have led to the creation of similar report cards in other cities. By now, report cards have been prepared for Chennai (Madras), Pune, Ahmedabad, Calcutta and Mumbai (Bombay). While these exercises were undertaken under the auspices of the Public Affairs Centre (PAC), local NGOs collaborated with PAC in these cities. There are also some cases of

other groups in some cities doing report card projects on their own, but with technical advice from PAC. Thus, a report card on Baroda was prepared by a civic group in that city. In Ahmedabad, a special report card was prepared on the services of interest to the urban poor women. In Bangalore also, more specialised report cards have been prepared at the initiative of other organisations as will be discussed below. Examples are the report cards on hospitals and on public transport. The original experiment thus led to a spate of similar studies for other cities and agencies and stimulated a variety of citizen groups to make use of study findings in different contexts.

### **Service Provider Responses**

The **Bangalore Development Authority (BDA)** was the first public agency to respond to the report card in a systematic fashion. Its commissioner asked PAC to assist in doing a report card on a few of its layouts (both middle income and low income schemes) in the hope that the results could be used to motivate the BDA officials to be more responsive to the people. For the first time in India, this survey enabled a public agency also to seek feedback from its customers on the issue of corruption. The new report card helped BDA to identify the weak areas in its service planning and delivery systems. The follow up actions taken by BDA provided a role for PAC to diagnose the problems of the agency-customer interface. As of date, PAC's analysis and advice have resulted in a series of training workshops for the BDA managers and case workers (who deal with the public) and a study of the agency's internal systems and practices. It is likely that new systems will be put in place that will not only make BDA's operations more efficient and responsive, but also more user friendly and transparent.

The **Bangalore City Corporation (BCC)** was another public agency that responded to the report card. BCC is a much larger and more complex organisation than BDA. It has a much wider range of services and a large number of range and ward offices all over the city. BCC's responses were threefold. First of all, its commissioner (chief executive) initiated a programme to involve citizen groups and NGOs in the city as partners in a move to improve the civic services. Waste management was used as an entry point to tap the energies of these organisations and to stimulate them to experiment with new ways to solve the city's problems. This initiative has resulted in the creation of a forum called "Swabhimana" (self esteem), an informal network of city officials and non-governmental groups who get together periodically and work out answers to priority problems. This forum not only experiments with new approaches to solving problems, but also disseminates information widely and performs a watchdog function. The network has expanded with more and more residents' associations linking up with the core group. PAC is a member of this group and plays a coordinating role as required.

More recently, BCC has turned to PAC for new ideas to improve the agency-citizen interface. As a result, proposals are now under consideration to reform the property tax administration and the approval of building plans, both of which are well known for corrupt practices and harassment of citizens. BCC has recently introduced a new grievance redressal system for which PAC's assistance has been sought. A new training and orientation for the concerned officials has been carried out by PAC. Thus BCC has sought to stimulate greater citizen participation in its services, simplify its services and make them more citizen friendly, and respond to public complaints in a more efficient and transparent manner. The report card acted as a trigger for these initiatives and PAC has been actively involved in their design and implementation.

Bangalore's public hospitals provide another example of an interesting response to PAC's special report card on the subject. This report card was an offshoot of the general report card on the city's services. The two leading public hospitals of the city were extremely poorly rated in the report card in comparison to both non-profit and for profit hospitals. Both poor service delivery and corruption were highlighted in the findings. The media was active in the dissemination of the study findings. In response, these two hospitals organised a day long meeting in collaboration with PAC and a few other NGOs in the city to discuss ways and means to improve their services. After this lively meeting, the hospitals have agreed to join with a voluntary group to set up "help desks" to assist patients and to reorient their staff to be more responsive and efficient. This is a very recent development, but the decisions taken at the meeting look promising.

## **Second Round Developments**

PAC's work with the citizen groups and media in Bangalore have resulted in several other initiatives that have a bearing on corruption. All these are examples of how civil society institutions can demand greater transparency in public affairs and initiate collective action in support of this goal when they are strengthened in terms of knowledge and motivation. We highlight below three such cases.

## **Case 1**

Residents' associations in eight wards of the city played an innovative role in the civic elections of Bangalore in 1996 through a campaign to disseminate information about the candidates who had entered the fray. The objective was to gather and disseminate pertinent information about candidates that citizens needed to know before they cast their votes. It was a common practice among political parties to project the party image and reveal very little about their candidates. The campaign was an attempt to turn this around by asking candidates to reveal their background, qualifications and experience. They were asked to sign statements giving personal responses to a variety of questions. They were asked, for example, whether they pay income tax and whether they had any corruption or criminal charges against them. Their credentials in terms of past accomplishments and future priorities were explored. This information was put together in a comparative format and disseminated to the voters in the wards just before the voting day. It was reported that some candidates withdrew from the contest as a result of the campaign. Whether this experiment made any difference to the choices made by the voters is difficult to say. But it showed the people how information on candidates could be generated through collective action and how the process could be used to demand greater transparency in public life. The campaign signalled to the political parties and candidates that people care about the quality of candidates and that corruption and other abuses were matters of concern to them.

## **Case 2**

In recent months, the municipal commissioner of Bangalore mounted a campaign to demolish illegally constructed buildings in the city. In one area, an illegal structure erected by a temple was also pulled down. The supporters of the temple protested this action, and got a few political leaders, including the Mayor, to support their stand. It looked as if the commissioner who upheld the law was at fault and could be overruled. Surprisingly, within a short time, there was a public outcry against the Mayor's statements, followed by a spate of letters and editorials in the press supporting the commissioner's action. The campaign was led by the residents' associations and NGOs who had worked with PAC on the followup of the report card and the election campaign. Soon political leaders at the highest level rebuked the Mayor and other leaders who had opposed the commissioner's action. The demolition of illegal structures was thus upheld.

Both these cases show how the civil society can play an effective role in challenging corrupt practices and other abuses of public power provided its members are organised and motivated to demand public accountability. Report cards acted as seeds that caused the initiation of collective action in support of good governance. Each experiment enables the groups to learn and gain strength to tackle the new problems they encounter.

### **Media Follow up of Report Cards**

Yet another example of a second round development is what a major newspaper the *Times of India* did with PAC's report card on hospitals. Armed with the information provided by the report card, the reporter concerned went to the public hospitals, and interviewed senior officials and doctors to get their side of the story. She then went on to talk to patients to get a confirmation on the report card findings. Her report on the subject in the newspaper was on the front page and generated a public debate on the subject that went on for several days. The message was loud and clear that the abuses and extortion being practised in the city's public hospitals should not be tolerated. Within a few weeks, some nurses in one of the public hospitals were arrested on charges of corruption and negligence in a child delivery case.

This shows how innovative journalists can build on the report card findings and assemble further information on the problems of corruption and poor service delivery. In India, examples of this kind are still few and far between. Nevertheless, the potential for such follow up work is considerable. Its payoff in terms of creating public awareness and stimulating public officials to act in the present case was significant.

### **III**

#### **Is Bangalore Changing?**

It is difficult to measure the impact of the various developments described above on citizens' awareness and on the behaviour of service providers in Bangalore. For one thing, neither the report card nor the subsequent interventions can be regarded as major or continuing events in a large city. Corrupt practices and non-responsive services have complex and multiple causes and cannot be reformed overnight. Similarly, not all people or organisations are equally affected by and hence concerned about the issues involved. Public awareness and agency actions will no doubt be influenced also by many other factors such as policy changes and other governmental

actions. To unscramble the joint effects of these diverse developments is by no means an easy task.

On the other hand, a period of about three years has elapsed since the report card on Bangalore was completed. It is not premature to ask whether people feel that their awareness of the problems of civic services and remedies has improved. It is equally pertinent to ascertain whether they feel that public agencies are beginning to respond to the new demands. At least, answers to these questions might show whether changes are occurring in the right direction.

We present below the results of a modest survey of citizens, agency officials and media staff (editors, reporters, etc.) that attempted an assessment of their views and perceptions of the changes taking place in the city and its services. A judgmental sample of 100 persons drawn from citizen groups, officials and the media was prepared of whom 74 responded through personal interviews. The sample is admittedly small and does not claim statistical reliability. Nevertheless, the results may provide useful pointers to the directional changes in the city in the post-report card period.

#### **Survey on impact of NGO/ Citizen Groups on Quality of Public Services**

- 93 percent of the respondents agree that citizen awareness of the problems concerning public services in Bangalore has increased in the last three years
- 89 percent of the respondents say there are more citizen / resident Groups active in Bangalore than three years ago.
- 83 percent of the respondents state that they are personally more actively involved in the issues of public service quality than they were three years ago
- 54 percent of the respondents feel that the public agencies are more responsive to citizen problems than three years ago
- 89 percent of the respondents feel that newspapers are reporting more on local governance issues than three years ago
- 69 percent of the respondents feel public pressure has resulted in improved services
- 68 percent of the respondents say that, as a result of public pressure, willingness to change in public agencies is more than it used to be earlier,
- 29 percent of the respondents feel that corruption has declined as a result of public pressure while 46 percent feel it has not declined, and 25 percent are unsure.
- 47 percent of the respondents feel that the behaviour of the staff in public agencies has improved as a result of public pressure

- 49 percent of the respondents say public pressure has lead to increased sharing of information by public agencies
- 79 percent of the respondents acknowledge the role of NGOs/resident groups in creating greater confidence among the people in their ability to bring about improvement in public services in their neighbourhood.

The findings reported above provide some evidence on the kinds of changes currently being experienced by a cross section of people in Bangalore. There is a clear and consistent pattern of positive changes in terms of increased public awareness, more active media role in the dissemination of information and greater responsiveness on the part of the public service providers. Only a minority of the respondents, however, feel that corruption is declining. This is not altogether surprising as corruption is a function of multiple causes some of which are deep rooted and long term in nature.

It is useful to supplement this evidence with a sampling of the recent views expressed by the leaders of the major public agencies in Bangalore. Their statements, quoted below, reflect the concerns of the leaders about the issues under discussion in this paper. To the extent there is a convergence of views on the need for change and for involving civil society in improving services and accountability, their proposals and assessments of the situation could be seen as reinforcing the findings of the sample survey of citizens reported above. These statements can be regarded as a response to the report card as well as the subsequent developments described in this paper. The quotations reproduced below are from the interviews press reporters have had with the agency leaders in recent months.

Laxmi Venkatachalam, Commissioner, Bangalore Development Authority says: Under the Swabhimana Movement, interactions with citizens' groups has been stepped up by the creation of ward offices in some of the layouts. We encourage residents' associations to meet us frequently and discuss their needs. .... To facilitate quick redressal of grievances, senior officials have been asked to meet the public. .... More than this, we want timely feedback from residents to help in the groundwork and monitor the work of officials, especially the contractors. .... BDA has also initiated an organisational development programme with the assistance of the Public Affairs Centre."

Vijay Gore, Chairman, Karnataka Electricity Board says: " We need residents' associations to participate in the maintenance of street lights, which though a BCC responsibility, is done partly by us. Our second proposal is for the associations to take up the bill book, help in collection and also prune trees that obstruct cables. The city is growing beyond our reach; so we would like any organisation to come forward and help us."

J.P. Sharma, Chairman, Bangalore Water and Sanitation Board says: " The associations are our watchdogs who can trace unauthorised connections and take up counselling. They can help us with meter reading and cash collection. .... They can watch over our officials. We are going to have division-wise meetings with residents to create interaction."

## **Conclusions**

1. Experiments with report cards in Bangalore confirm the value of this public feedback mechanism both to enable citizens to signal service providers about their performance and to stimulate the latter to respond to these signals. As noted above, response to the feedback is a function of complex and varied factors. It is not easy, therefore, to predict whether responses will occur and whether they will be in the right direction. In some cases, negative or defensive reactions may be triggered by a report card. The Bangalore experience, however, is that public agencies are capable of responding positively to the stimulus of the report card. This has been borne out by the response to our citywide report card as well as to the report cards on specialized agencies. Needless to say, the response cannot be attributed solely to the publicity given to the report card, but also to other facilitating actions taken alongside. It could also be that the novelty of the method and its ability to put agencies on the spot triggered these positive responses.

2. Both the report card and the subsequent developments seem to have had a positive impact on the citizens' awareness of Bangalore's public service problems. The media have played a part in this which citizens seem to recognise. There is some evidence that public agencies are beginning to be more responsive compared to the pre-report card days. The time taken by the agencies to digest the feedback and respond is admittedly long (one to two years). Frequent changes in agency leadership is a problem that exacerbates this tendency. Part of the answer to this problem lies in the much needed reform of personnel policies in government. Changes of this kind cannot be neatly programmed as they call for systemic reforms as well as new attitudes. This applies in particular to the control of corruption which tends to be a long term process.

3. A unique feature of the report card is the way in which it focusses attention on corruption, a phenomenon that has always been difficult to pinpoint and quantify. The collusive nature of corruption in many cases makes it difficult for outsiders to estimate its magnitude and severity. Getting the givers of bribes to identify the agencies involved achieves a



measure of specificity and credibility. Comparison between agencies, locations, etc., attracts public attention and puts an unwelcome spotlight on the agencies. In general, those who head these public agencies are anxious to avoid such publicity. The report card on corruption gives organised citizen groups the kind of information they need to seek reform in specific agencies and to demand greater public accountability.

4. One of the lessons from Bangalore is that service delivery and corruption are closely interlinked. Inefficient and cumbersome services create opportunities for corruption. Non-transparent procedures and arbitrary decisions force people to collude with corrupt officials or to succumb to extortion. The strategy for corruption control should therefore start with measures to improve service delivery. Increased access to information on services, specification of standards of services and customers' rights, appeal mechanisms, etc., are steps that can go a long way to reduce the opportunities and incentives to engage in corrupt practices. When it comes to "grand corruption", reform of service delivery alone may not be adequate. But even here, greater transparency, access to information and appeal mechanisms will no doubt enable the more honest players to withstand pressures from the corrupt.

5. The experience with report cards in Bangalore as well as other cities reinforces the case for institutionalising periodic surveys of the users of public services as a source of feedback on the performance of service providers. The use of public feedback can act as a proxy for the pressure of competition in a context where customers have few choices. Most public service providers and regulators are monopolies and the scope for making them compete in the market place is rather limited in many developing countries. External research and advocacy groups could demonstrate the use of public feedback as a means to stimulate public service agencies to be more responsive to their customers. In the final analysis, service providers as well as their supervising authorities should see merit in this approach and commission user surveys on a periodic basis.

Report cards should not be viewed as a one time exercise. A report card on public services or on a specific agency could be repeated every year or after a longer period depending upon the urgency of problems and the resources available to conduct surveys. Report cards across cities are also useful, especially when there is interest in comparing the performance of a city or of specific services with that of others. For the sake of credibility and to stimulate increased public awareness and action, it will be best if the initiative is taken by local non-governmental bodies. Local newspapers can often be useful allies in this endeavour. Since the design of the survey and data collection and analysis need to be done professionally, it is desirable to involve market research or survey firms in the country in the design and

conduct of the field work. Local foundations and enterprises (or associations) are promising sources of funding to meet the costs of the surveys. An important reason why non-governmental groups should take the lead is because they could play a continuing and catalytic role in initiating followup activities such as interacting with the public agencies and instigating change through civil society action.

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